

9
*Reflections on the Character and State of departed
Christians :*

IN

A SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DECEASE

OF

THE REV. CALEB EVANS, D.D.

PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CONGREGATION, MEETING IN
BROADMEAD, BRISTOL;

AND SENIOR TUTOR TO THE ACADEMY IN THAT CITY.

Preached in Cannon-street, Birmingham,

SEPTEMBER 4, 1791.

BY SAMUEL PEARCE.

THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED.

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AS a reason for the distance of time between the preaching and publishing of the following discourse, the author wishes to say, that as it was at first composed for the pulpit, without the most distant idea of its being ever sent to the press, the many solicitations of the late Doctor's friends in Birmingham, were for a long time urged in vain; especially as he was conscious that the memory of so good a man, would be but too imperfectly preserved in the ensuing pages.

Renewed requests, however, attended with additional motives, have at length prevailed; and the Sermon is offered to the public, as the tribute of an affectionate Pupil to the memory of a most worthy Tutor: in hopes that the friends of the deceased will accept the attempt, while they wish it were better executed.

ADVERTISEMENT.

Minds awake to the sensibilities of friendship and gratitude, will readily make allowance for some expressions of tender regret, which may seem more suited to private correspondence than a public discourse, delivered to a large and crowded auditory; especially when they are informed, that it was composed a day or two after the author had been a witness to the sorrows of the Family, the Academy, and the Congregation, who all once rejoiced in Dr. Evans, as their head. Such scenes naturally formed impressions, under the influence of which he may have indulged himself in a mode of expression, which, in other circumstances, might be probably exceptionable.

Birmingham, Dec. 5, 1791.

A SERMON.

the world of opinion as and is now
the sum of religious and civil knowledge among
men on the world. I will then go on to show
that it is not the world that is to blame, but
the religion that is to blame.

Believe me, my dear

A SERMON.

~~the divine importance of your life~~
~~and daily exertions to vindicate~~
THE death of great and good men is a matter of no small concern to the truly pious, of every denomination; and it seems as useful as it is natural, to notice such events from the pulpit; not merely as a token of respect to their memories, but to calm the minds of afflicted friends, to justify the dispensations of God, and to excite those who remain to emulate the character of those who are taken away.

Our dear departed brother, the Rev. Dr. EVANS, was a man both good and great—his praise is in all the churches—the memory of his worth still lives in the hearts of all who knew him—and the news of his removal produced in many other minds (what it did in mine and yours) sensations like those the prophet felt of old, when he thus lamented his departing master: “ My father! my “ father! the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen “ thereof!”

Convinced that an attempt to improve this painful providence will be acceptable to you, as well as gratifying to myself; I know of no scripture more suited to direct such an effort, than that you find recorded

JOHN XI. 11.

OUR FRIEND LAZARUS SLEEPETH.

You need not be made acquainted with the particulars of the event to which these words relate: you remember that in Bethany, a small town a few miles distant from Jerusalem, there dwelt a very happy pious family, consisting of a brother and two sisters; they were very intimate with our Lord, and their house was the place of his residence as often as he came that way. Jesus Christ had a strong affection for this family—"He loved "Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." Ver. 5.

It seems Lazarus was afflicted with a disease which terminated in his death; but before his decease, his sisters sent to our Lord, who was then the other side of Jordan, saying, "Lord, behold "he whom thou lovest is sick." For wise reasons he chose neither to heal him of his disease, nor visit him in his affliction; "but abode two "days still in the same place where he was." He knew that although his permitting the decease of Lazarus, would occasion much temporary distress to his surviving friends, yet it would eventually tend

tend to the establishment of his divine mission, and therefore to the glory of God ; on which account he saith to his disciples, “ For your sakes I am “ glad, to the end that ye may believe.” Ver. 15.

At the expiration of these two days, he proposes to his disciples to visit Judea again ; but they, recollecting that they were in danger of losing their master, through the malice of the Jews, the last time they were there, object to his proposal : Jesus Christ urges the propriety of attending to our duty, whatever opposition may be made, or danger anticipated ; and, probably to induce them to accompany him, he adds, “ Our friend Lazarus “ sleepeth ; but I go that I may awake him out of “ sleep.” This is explained ver. 14, for he said plainly, “ Lazarus is *dead*.”

There appears a remarkable evidence of Christ’s *omniscience* in this declaration. The messengers sent by Mary and Martha only gave information of his sickness, yet we find he is now acquainted with his death : this, probably, among other occurrences of the same nature, was present to Peter’s mind, when, with devout humility he said, after our Lord’s resurrection, “ Lord, thou “ knowest *all things**.”

The figure here used by our Lord, to express the *death* of Lazarus, was familiar among the Jews. When God foretold the death of Moses, he says, “ Behold thou shalt *sleep* with thy fathers †.” And David, intreating divine interposition, saith,

* John xxi. 17. † Deut. xxxi. 16.

“Lighten mine eyes, O Lord, lest I *sleep* the *sleep* “of death*.” And as it was not unfrequent among Jews, so it was afterwards adopted by Christians: hence, saith Paul, “Those that *sleep* “in Jesus will God bring with him;” and the ancient christians, perhaps from this and similar passages, denominated their places of interment Cemeteries, or *sleeping places*.

It cannot then be asserted, that the term was *only* applicable to the state in which *Lazarus* was; but it applies to the situation of every good man who has passed the gates of death.

We shall consider our text, therefore, as calculated,

First, *To assist our reflections on the character of a true christian, living*; and,

Secondly, *On the state of a true christian, when dead*.

I. The words present us with the real character of a true christian, living. “Our *friend*,” saith Jesus. Friendship is in itself a pleasing subject, both for reflection and discourse, especially pious friendship; that friendship to which our thoughts are now to be directed—friendship for Jesus Christ.

Friendship for Jesus Christ evidences itself,

1. In a high esteem for his PERSON.

Lazarus, indeed, had opportunities of discovering his esteem for Christ, in a way which we have

* Psalm xiii. 3.

not;

not; by accommodating his human nature whilst he was in the flesh. Was he persecuted in Jerusalem? he might go to Bethany—there he found Lazarus and his sisters ready to receive him, and afford a welcome shelter from the rage and malice of his foes. Did he stand in need of food, or lodging? here he found attendance, so near approaching to unnecessary assiduity, as even to need restraint. Had his journeys occasioned his fatigue? here the tears of affection flowed in torrents to wash his feet, whilst Mary neither thought it too mean to wipe them with the hairs of her head, nor too extravagant to anoint them with the most costly perfume. Did the rest of mankind reject his doctrines, and insult his person? here he found Mary ready to sit at his feet, and listen to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. No wonder Jesus loved Mary, and her sister, and Lazarus—No wonder Lazarus and his sisters loved Jesus.

But though *we*, my brethren, can no longer entertain this noble guest in person, yet, by entertaining the highest esteem for his character, and maintaining his personal honors, we may still prove our friendship.

When the Judean world despised Christ, and called him the carpenter's son, Lazarus and his sisters owned him as their *Lord*, and gave the most public proofs of their respect. Nor shall we, if we are true friends to Christ, be backward to avow his cause, and maintain his honors.

A man

A man who thinks meanly of Christ, deserves not to bear his name. A mind enlightened into a knowledge of the gospel, cannot but revere **HIM** who shines throughout the whole as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person.—He will be *adored* as **GOD OVER ALL**, blessed for ever—*trusted* in as the great **HIGH PRIEST** of the christian profession—and *obeyed*, as **KING** in Zion, and the sole legislator of his church.

With these views of Christ, is it possible *his friend* should be indifferent, while the majesty of his nature, the efficacy of his sacrifice, or the glory of his gospel, are publicly or privately opposed, or despised, by nominal professors? It is an insult to the sacred name of friendship to suppose it for a moment.—Willing to endure the cross himself, the true christian cannot bear without poignant grief, and holy zeal, to see his Saviour thus crucified afresh, and put to open shame.

In the present day, Sirs, we have constant opportunities of seeking and supporting the dignity of the **SON OF GOD**. In this age, perhaps, above all others, those who *call* themselves his friends, are most assiduous in lessening his honors, and insulting his character. Infidels and Deists have been outdone, or else see their efforts are needless. In the last age, the glories of **IMMANUEL**, God with us, became the sport of Atheists, or the ostensible ground on which the sons of Deism opposed christianity—they have now quitted the field—professing christians,

christians, with the cross in their banners, have unsheathed the sword against the **LORD OF GLORY**, and Christ has been wounded in the house of his avowed friends!! O how doth it behove *us*, if we are *true* friends to him, to abound yet more and more in all our zealous and scriptural efforts, to fight the good fight of faith, and contend earnestly for those glorious truths respecting the person of Jesus, which were, by himself, and his own apostles, delivered to the saints.

2. Friendship for Christ will discover itself also, in a cordial, disinterested affection for his followers. Hence, saith Jesus, “ *our* friend Lazarus.” This good man did not confine his regard to Christ himself, but extended his kindness and care to his disciples too.

This has been since proposed as an indisputable evidence of real friendship for Christ, “ By this we “ know we are passed from death unto life, because “ we love the brethren*.” Pompous titles, splendid stations, unbounded wealth, extensive power, or universal knowledge, include the objects of worldly admiration, and direct the carnal heart where to place its friendship, and solicit its return: but a christian, looking beyond the external glitter of wealth, and deaf to the noisy gust of vain applause, seeks the society, and cultivates the friendship of the disciples of the lowly Jesus—the *man*, and not the *station*, he admires—and justly thinks
“ *A christian* is the highest stile of man.”

* 1 John iii. 14.

To

To select those whom Christ has selected; to lend assistance to those for whom his Redeemer bled; and to associate with those who are to be his companions for ever, will be his chief delight.—In the *christian*, he views *Christ himself*, and whether he meets him despised or applauded, abased or exalted, he will love the *christian* for Christ's sake, and consider that whatever he does to the disciple, his master considers as done to himself.

3. A true *christian*, or friend to Christ, will be much concerned for, and do all his endeavour to promote, the cause and interest of Christ. Nothing affords him more joy than to hear of its success:—like Barnabas, when he saw the grace of God at Antioch, he is *glad*; and like Judah, rejoices when the salvation of the Lord comes out of Zion:—whilst on the other hand, nothing gives him more pain than to hear of its decline. As David, so he can appeal to God, and say, “Lord, am I not “grieved with those that rise up against *thee*? I count “them *mine* enemies.”

A *christian's heart* is interested, and the feelings of his heart will provoke the activity of his hands. His time, his powers, his fortune, yea, his life itself will be a sacrifice, small in his esteem, so that the cause of Christ may be promoted. “I count not “my life dear,” said Paul, “so I may fulfil the mi-“nistry I have received of the Lord.”

False are all those professions of friendship made by men, which cease in the day of adversity, or are suspended in the hour of necessity. The
juvenile

juvenile lawyer could call Jesus, *Lord*, and ask his instructions; but being told to part with his possessions for the sake of Christ's poor, he went away sorrowful, and thereby proved his insincerity. Too many resemble him in the present day; they will call Jesus, *Lord*, but will afford no assistance to erect his kingdom; and even feel themselves unconcerned whether it prospers or declines. Let such remember, that indifference of heart, or inactivity of life, respecting the cause of christianity in the world, leaves no room to hope that they shall ever share its blessings: let them not imagine they shall receive any thing of the Lord, for with what measure they mete, it shall be measured unto them again.

We have seen then, that only such as possess an high esteem for Christ, a cordial affection for his people, and manifest a zealous concern for his interest, can reasonably hope that Jesus will own them as his, and his peoples friends, at a future day.

But such an one, both we, and Jesus too, recognized in our dear departed brother. Few men discovered more genuine regard to the person, followers, and interest of Christ, from the time he first felt the saving influence of religious truth, to the period of his dissolution.

He was born in the year 1737. Under the care of a pious parent, his mind not only became habituated to morality, but in early life gave satisfactory evidences of the most genuine piety. Desirous of doing good to souls, he diligently applied himself to theological

theological studies ; and having done himself and tutors honor, by his assiduity and rapid improvement, he appeared in the character of a gospel minister ; and soon after, at the pressing request of the congregation, meeting in Broadmead, Bristol, became an assistant to his father, the late Rev. HUGH EVANS, there, being then about the age of 22 years. After the expiration of eight years he took upon him, in conjunction with his father, the office of pastor over that church ; which honorable office he filled with the most distinguished reputation, till he was removed to the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, on the 9th of August last, aged 54 years.

How pleasing the review of his character !—Eminently a friend to Jesus, the honors of his person, the deity of his nature, and the glory of his mediatorial office he warmly and ably defended, both in public discourses, and private conversation. Controversies he never courted, yet never slighted them, when he thought it needful either to speak or write in defence of the truth. Neither personal friendship, eminence of rank, nor literary skill in his opponents, repressed his zeal for the Saviour's glory. But here I need not enlarge. His works praise him in the gates—The writings he has left behind him say all this, and more, in behalf of his profound veneration for Jesus Christ.

Nor was he deficient in his regard for the sincere followers of the Lamb. He was a friend to them.

them. He despised no man; he loved all as the creatures of God, and was at all times happy to promote their welfare; but especially he loved the household of faith. In him the indigent believer always found a friend ready to weep in his sorrows, direct him in his difficulties, and assist him in all his necessities. Many instances are still present to the recollection of his friends, wherein the fatherless have found in him a father, and by extraordinary exertions he hath made the widow's heart to sing for joy.

For the interest of Christ at large, how great his concern it is impossible to say. Providence called him to move in a large and public sphere; and for his various duties therein, he was eminently fitted; not discharging them merely as the incumbrances of his station, but as the privileges of his existence.

The affairs of the academy, over which he presided—of the Western association (which is very large), besides the peculiar duties of his pastoral office, were principally under his direction; and his pious soul was happy or distressed as the cause of his master flourished or decayed.

Many circumstances of his life might (if necessary) be introduced, wherein he discovered the greatest tenderness of mind for Zion's prosperity; and proved how anxious he was to have gospel truth remain uncorrupted, and gospel tempers and conduct invariably manifested: for well aware that a church, or minister, would never prosper whilst he
or

or they maintained opinions derogatory to the honor of Jesus Christ; he not only preached frequently on the subjects of Christ's *divinity* and *atonement*, but sought more extensive usefulness, by publishing some of his compositions on those subjects. The last work of this kind he ever published, has been greatly blessed to the establishment of many in the truths of the gospel; and if any of my hearers wish to peruse a work, pregnant with piety, supporting the important doctrines of the cross on scriptural foundations, and in an experimental manner, I would recommend to them Dr. EVANS's four Sermons on the Atonement, entitled "CHRIST CRUCIFIED;" which will amply repay the purchase and the perusal to every serious mind.

In that publication we discover how firm his mind had been kept in that great leading truth of the gospel, *the doctrine of the ATONEMENT*, concerning which he thus writes to his people:—

" It is now thirty years since you first called
 " me to become one of your ministers, in connec-
 " tion with my honored father. I began my mi-
 " nistry amongst you, as some of you may possibly
 " remember, with a discourse from those words of
 " Paul to the Corinthians, *I determined not to know*
 " *any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him*
 " *crucified.* And now that I am advancing fast to
 " the close of my life and ministry, and have rea-
 " son to expect that at no very distant period, I
 " shall be numbered with my fathers, and called
 " to give up my account, I wish these sermons to
 " stand

“ stand as a humble memorial of my firmest adherence to the same doctrine, which has ever been uniformly and zealously preached to you by each of your present, as well as former ministers.

“ I desire to die testifying that this is the gospel of the grace of God, wherein ye stand. God forbid you should receive any other, though an angel from heaven, were it possible, should preach it unto you *.”

By this address, written about two years before his death, we see, that his investigation of gospel truth, so far from *weakening his faith* in the doctrine of the *atonement*, only served to establish him more firmly in its divinity and importance ; yea, of such consequence did he consider it, that in the same work he says, “ To me it appears with a blaze of the brightest evidence, to be the grand distinguishing doctrine of the New Testament, the glory of christianity, and the highest and most illustrious display of the divine perfections and character ;— and I verily believe, that the general rejection of this doctrine would involve in it, eventually, the destruction of all serious practical religion †.”

I make these quotations as a reply to a late publication, wherein an anti-trinitarian writer of note hath asserted, that the ablest, wisest, and most pious christians, were of his opinion respecting the person and work of Christ ‡.

* Preface, p. 8, 9.

† Ibid, p. 5, 6.

‡ See Dr. Priestley's Address to the Jews, prefixed to his Discourse on the Resurrection of Jesus ;—his words are these, p. 16.

Whilst Dr. EVANS is allowed to be pious, wise, and good, that acknowledgment will contradict an assertion so bold and unjust. His *living* and *dying* testimony opposed the sentiments of Socinus as unscriptural, unsafe, and inimical to morality itself.

Such a light in the gospel hemisphere, we might have thought would have been long continued to illuminate and refresh the churches! Such a friend to Christ, to his people, to his cause, we would have wished long to have enjoyed!—but wise heaven otherwise decreed. This star will shine on earth no more! This friend shall no more exert himself on earth for Jesus!—No, our friend EVANS

“ The belief of the **DIVINE UNITY**, and also that of the proper **HUMANITY OF CHRIST**, are not now the private opinions of a few persons only, which some time ago they were almost afraid to avow; but they are publicly professed by great numbers the **MOST RESPECTABLE** for their **ABILITY**, their **LEARNING**, and their **PIETY**, among christians.”

It is evident to every one acquainted with the Socinian controversy, that the Doctor here meant to describe persons of his own religious tenets, though he as evidently insinuates that WE oppose the **UNITY OF THE GODHEAD**, and the **PROPER HUMANITY OF CHRIST**. It is known to the **WORLD**, that whilst, in obedience to the authority of revelation, we maintain there are “ three who bear record in heaven, the “ Father, Word, and Holy Ghost;” yet we do unreservedly declare and believe these three are **ONE**. And although we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ, as to his **DIVINE NATURE**, is “ **GOD OVER ALL**, blessed for “ ever;” yet we unequivocally affirm, that “ as concerning the **FLESH** “ he came from the fathers,” that he was “ bone of our bone, and flesh “ of our flesh,” and that in **OUR NATURE**, though in a glorified state, he now reigns in heaven, as the great head of the church. Though misrepresentation may **SERVE** a cause, it can surely never do it **CREDIT**.

sleepeth!

sleepeth! Death hath closed his eyes in peaceful slumbers, to open them no more on terrestrial scenes. In the cold grave he lies, whilst we drop the tributary tear over our departed friend, by him unheeded.

Death is a gloomy subject. Reflection on it chills the mind, and appals human nature. To be torn from our dear connections;—to quit those scenes which have afforded us so much delight;—to become tenants of those dreary habitations, the repository of man in his most abject state;—to dwell with “skulls, and monuments, and worms;”—to part with all the glory of our nature, to be separated from intelligence, yea from animation itself;—to be constrained to say to corruption, thou art our father, and to acknowledge the worm for our brother and sister!—At *this*, no wonder nature shudders: but our Saviour, in condescension to our feelings, calls upon us to view it under a softer representation—to consider it not as *annihilation*, but as a *sleep*; so that as we in imagination pass by the tomb of our deceased brother, we will calm our minds by reflecting thus:—‘Our friend EVANS is not dead, ‘but sleepeth—this is his couch—here let him rest ‘from the fatigues of the day of life, till the night ‘of time be past, and the eternal morning dawn.’

Sleep gives us three ideas of the state of departed christians:—

1. It leads our thoughts to *inactivity*.

As during the season of repose we forget our usual exertions, our members are no more employed

in labor, but a general indolence prevails; so at death all the former efforts of the christian cease.

The pious *man* is no longer found pouring out his soul to God in private prayer; the walls of his closet, which have heretofore witnessed his devout supplications, his fervent petitions, and his grateful praise, now witness them no more.

The pious *master, husband, or parent*, no more raises his domestic altars to the God of his life, no longer leads the devotions of his household: his children and servants no more listen to his salutary instructions, nor weep beneath his affectionate exhortations; nor more does the friend of his bosom hear him pour the balm of pious consolation in the afflictive hour.

The pious *minister* no more enters the pulpit, nor charms the ears nor warms the hearts of his auditory, by his zealous and affectionate delivery of gospel truth—no longer enters the sacred laver, and there consecrates the seals of his ministry to the obedience of Christ—no longer meets his beloved flock at the table of the Lord, breaking the bread of life to them, and directing their minds and their affections to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.

The pious *author* no more appears the champion of heavenly truth, nor longer enters the lists with the public enemies of Christ and his gospel. The truth-fraught page—the animating sentiment—the convincing argument—the harmony of just and graceful composition—no more flow from his well-directed pen.

The pious *friend* no more visits the social circle, where before with cheerful decorum he regulated the pleasures of friendly hearts.

The pious *tutor* no more trains up the youthful mind, in habits of scientific and religious truth. His exertions for their improvement in useful knowledge and heavenly virtue; his efforts to fit them for usefulness, in the various stations wherein providence might in future place them, cease—and cease for ever.

The removal of a man in *either* of these stations would be felt, and felt severely; but the removal of our friend EVANS, makes us feel and bemoan the loss of one who filled them *ALL*. In him, the children mourn an indulgent father; the servants bewail an affectionate master; and the widow weeps—yes, these eyes have seen her tears—she weeps the loss of an invaluable husband.

Zion sits in the dust, bemoaning, because he is not, and almost refuses to be comforted. “ The “ beauty of Israel is slain; how are the mighty “ fallen! The elders have ceased from the gate, “ the young men from their music; the joy of “ our heart is ceased, our dance is turned into “ mourning; the crown is fallen from our head. “ For this our heart is faint; for these things our “ eyes are dim; because of the mountain of Zion “ which is desolate *.”

Yes, he who late ascended his pulpit as his throne, and, like a faithful ambassador of Christ,

* 2 Sam. i. 19. Lam. v. 14, &c.

besought sinners to be reconciled to God, hath relinquished his wonted labors ; hath ceased to stand pleading the cause of heaven with rebellious man. The terrors of the law shall no more, from *his* lips, arouse the careless, nor the mild accents of the gospel dissolve the stony heart. “ What thing “ shall I take to witness for thee ? What thing shall “ I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem ? What “ shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, “ O virgin daughter of Zion ? For thy breach is “ great, like the sea ; who can heal thee * ? ”

His *pen* shall be no more employed in defending the sacred truths of the inspired volume—the wisdom and equity of the divine conduct, the awful depravity of human nature, the riches of sovereign grace, the dignity of **IMMANUEL**’s person, the efficacy of his sacrifice, and the personality and deity of the **HOLY SPIRIT**, which have been so clearly exhibited and ably maintained by him †, shall no more receive elucidation and proof from his hands. And how many friendly hearts will unite to lament his loss, whose presence was at once both their joy and their guide ! Perhaps no man in his social intercourse, ever steered more happily free of the extremes of morose reserve, and foolish levity ;—“ cheerful, and not light,” would that society be where our friend **EVANS** was.

* Lam. ii. 13.

† See his **ADDRESS** to the serious and candid Professors of Christianity ; also his **TWO SERMONS** on the scripture doctrine of the **DEITY** of the **SON** and **HOLY SPIRIT**.

But

But to the pupils who, under his care, were trained or training up for the gospel ministry, how great his loss it is impossible to describe. We *feel* it; but though he taught us much, he never taught us to express the grief his removal would cost us. He knew well how to gain our affections, whilst he secured our respect;—at once we loved the friend, and venerated the tutor. So mildly he corrected our mistakes, and so gladly marked our improvement, that the reverberated happiness which our attention to his wise instructions afforded *him*, was one great stimulus to our diligence: nor was it possible that a worthy pupil could ever be beneath his care, who did not feel his esteem for Dr. EVANS rise, as his acquaintance with his character became more intimate. His concern for our happiness did not terminate with the years of our pupilage:—how many of us can witness the pains it cost him, to fix us in those situations, for which he thought our various capacities, dispositions, and improvements, fitted us!—How many wise and pious cautions hath he given us, respecting our conduct as men, as christians, and as ministers!—What journeys would he take to assist in our settlement with a people; and what undisguised pleasure did he express, when he discovered a prospect of our future usefulness and comfort!—Surely we cannot do less than revere his memory. May we have grace to profit by his pious counsels!

As a public character, his activity was well known. Your hearts, and the hearts of thousands

more, will much longer perpetuate his worth, than this unworthy tribute to his memory. A recollection of his kindness must be now present to many in this congregation. But one year has measured its course, since he took a public part in the solemn services accompanying my union to you as a pastor. I hope I shall never forget his truly affectionate address to me on that occasion, but by the manifestation of truth, commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God*. You remember also, my worthy brethren, who on that day were invested with the office of DEACONS, in this society, with what simplicity and affection he set before you, both the honors and duties of your pious functions. Nor can the members of this church forget the pleasures of that day, to which he so largely contributed, in conjunction with our late dear and honored brother, Mr. HALL, of Amsby †. Little, ah! little did we then think, that ere another twelvemonth came, those two great men of God should be no more!—But they are gone! Our friend HALL is removed, and our friend EVANS also sleepeth.

* 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2; the passage on which Dr. EVANS grounded his charge at the ordination.

† Rev. Mr. HALL preached to the church on the same occasion. He expired almost suddenly, on Lord's-day evening, March 31, 1791. A funeral discourse delivered by Mr. Ryland, of Northampton; to which are annexed, the oration at the grave, by Mr. Fuller, and an account of the rise of Amsby Church, and its successive ministers, particularly of its late venerable pastor, has been since published; to which the reader is referred for a fuller account of this most excellent man.

I reflect

I reflect with solemnity, that the hand then placed on this unworthy head, expressive of his approbation of the union which then commenced, is now mouldering in the dust; and those lips which conveyed such salutary and affectionate instruction to my heart, are now sealed up for ever. Yes, his activity in this world for God, for us, for Zion at large, is over.

2. But sleep affords us another idea; not only a cessation from *pleasing activity*, but also from *painful suffering*; it gives us the idea of *rest*, and in this respect, is analogous to death. "I heard," saith John, "a voice from heaven, saying, write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may *rest* from their labors."

Our respected friend, whose loss we now deplore, amiable as he was in his manners, and useful as he was in his life, was not exempt from many sorrows, especially towards the close of his days. I had almost numbered the sympathy of his heart among the causes of his distress—few men possessed so much of the delicacies of sympathetic sensibility, or shared so much in others woe as he—he did truly weep with those who wept.

His many and great exertions, greatly debilitated his nervous system, so that for some years past, his health has suffered various interruptions; to which, trials of a more afflictive nature have also largely contributed.

About

About twenty-one months ago, he returned from supplying this congregation—he arrived home late in the evening, and found all well; but the first intelligence he received on the following day was, that his eldest son, just then established in business, had been seized with a violent fit in the night, and was found breathless in his room in the morning.—He tenderly loved his children, and so severe a stroke made a deep wound in such a heart as his.

To this must be added, a sudden and painful event, arising from his religious connections; which taught him by distressing experience, that not the most disinterested friendship, purity of intention, nor guarded conduct, can at all times secure from unkindness and censure:—but friendship is impatient of unkindness, and conscious integrity starts at unmerited reproach. Surprize and grief overcame a constitution already injured by unusual exertion, and sudden affliction, and no doubt accelerated his dissolution.

His habit became more relaxed, till about three months since, when an unexpected paralytic stroke for a few days deprived him of the powers of speech and motion; but by degrees he recovered, so as to be able to converse freely, and take occasional exercise. His friends marked with gratitude his returning health, and flattered themselves he would soon be restored to their highest wishes. On Lord's-day, the 7th of August, he proposed preaching in the evening to a favourite congregation, at Downton,

Downend, near Bristol, and said, he hoped he should be able to speak to them for half an hour: but, Lord, how precarious is our state, and uncertain our designs! About two o'clock the same day, he had a second seizure, easy in its approach, but mortal in its effects; for being put in his bed, he neither spoke a word, nor altered his position, till the following Tuesday, when he died, or rather finally fell asleep.

For some time before, he had expressed his wish for departure, and seemed to possess a presentiment of its approach. On the last day of his administering the ordinance of the Lord's-supper, he told the communicants at the table, that he longed to depart, and be with Christ, repeating with energy, "it is far better." Indeed the extract you have heard from his late publication, indicates his expectations that he should not long survive that work, and many occasional expressions which he dropt, confirmed his own opinion of his approaching dissolution*.

Perhaps a peculiar depression of spirits, and lassitude of body, occasioned his suspicions;—but with him the head-ach, and the heart-ach too, are over. "Our friend EVANS sleepeth"—no bereaving providences, no unkind reflections, no bodily afflictions, can disturb him now.

* To one affecting expression of this nature I was an ear-witness, about a fortnight before his death. The sexton enquiring whether he had registered some burials? he replied, "Yes; and I "will return the book to you to-morrow—for you will soon have "my name to register."

" Softly

“ Softly his fainting head he lay

“ Upon his Maker’s breast ;

“ His Maker kiss’d his soul away,

“ And laid his flesh to rest.”

3. But, let us not forget that although the members of his body are now inactive, though the places that knew him once, know him now no more—a season draws nigh, when he shall awake and rise from his dusty bed, the mouldering tomb wherein he lies. Death is represented by sleep particularly, in reference to the *resurrection of the dead*—yes, whilst we, like Martha, go to Jesus, and say, Lord, if thou hadst been here—if thou hadst exerted thy power, our brother had not died. We hear him replying to us, as he did to her, “ **YOUR BROTHER SHALL RISE AGAIN.**” I, says he, am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. This, my brethren, is our sufficient consolation under every bereaving providence, that those who sleep in Jesus, the Lord will bring with him. Our Saviour hath given us repeated proofs of his power, by raising some from the dead, whilst (cloathed in our nature) he dwelt among us; of which the case of Lazarus is an eminent instance; but as Lazarus, and others, then raised, fell victims to the stroke of death afterwards, these were not adequate assurances of our resurrection to *immortal life*: In order, therefore, to lay a foundation for our liveliest hope, the Redeemer himself submitted to the abasement of death, and having remained a sufficient time under its dominion, to

prove

prove that he was really dead, he arose by his own almighty power, agreeable to his former express declaration*; he burst the fetters of the grave; he resumed his former appearance; he conversed frequently with those who had been most intimate with him before his crucifixion; he convinced the most incredulous of his disciples, that he was the same Jesus, on whose person and instructions he had attended; thereby producing a public acknowledgment of his *divinity* and *messiahship*†. After forty days he openly ascended where he was before‡, directing his attendants in their future conduct, and predicting some remarkable events, whereby the prevalency of his intercession might be demonstrated.

On the day of pentecost he imparted his promised gifts to his disciples; the **HOLY GHOST** bore public attestation to the truth of his doctrine, and his actual government of the church: his followers, satisfied of his authority, went forth preaching (among others) the grand doctrine of the resurrection—a doctrine under the constant influence of which they lived and taught, and in defence of which, having witnessed its success, they cheerfully suffered and died, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God; persuaded, that because Christ lived, they should live also. Let a firm persuasion of the truth of this doctrine, reconcile our minds to the provi-

* John ii. 19. x. 18. † John xx. 28.

‡ Luke xxiv. 51. with John iii. 13, and vi. 62.

dence which has removed our deceased friend ; let us assure ourselves, that he who hath conquered death, will redeem *bim* from its power : Though his body shall sleep in the ground, till the resurrection morning dawn, *then*, we are told, the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and the trumpet of God.—The trumpet shall sound—that life-giving sound shall awake his sleeping dust ;—quickenèd by the power of God, he shall shake off his robes of mortality ;—his body, now in a state of corruption, shall be fashioned like unto Christ's own glorious body ; arrayed in garments of immortality, he meets his coming Lord in the air. On him his Lord shall smile, on him bestow a crown, even a crown of righteousness, which fadeth not away. His happy spirit now joins the myriads of kindred spirits,—the spirits of just men made perfect, in contemplating the mysterious glories of the *incarnate* God, and participating of the pleasures which flow from the eternal throne ; but when that period arrives, which may be termed the grand prophesy of the gospel, the members of his immortal body shall join the powers of his seraphic mind, in mutual congratulations, and combined gratitude.

O happy day ! how pregnant art thou with all our largest wishes want—perfect knowledge, perfect purity, perfect and eternal felicity !

O happy day ! to what society will thou introduce us ! all the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles,

apostles, and martyrs, and saints of later times. There shall we meet a WATTS, a FLAVEL, a DODDRIDGE, an HOWE, an OWEN, and our EVANS, our friend EVANS too!—now, 'tis true, he sleepeth, and we must soon join his slumbers; but though our sleeping times differ, our waking time shall be one. In one instant all the saints of the Lord shall feel his almighty influence, and live to die no more: for as we are planted together in the likeness of our Saviour's death, so shall we be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

The resurrection opens up to us a light to cheer us amidst all the gloom of mortality. Who would be unwilling to tread the valley of the shadow of death, whilst he believed it the path to a better and immortal life?—Under all the breaches death hath made, or in prospect of our own removal from our christian friends, we are commanded “to comfort one another with these “words.”

It is our happiness also to reflect, that God ever lives: though the channel is closed, the fountain still runs. In all ages God has provided for his church, and his name is Jehovah-Jireh still. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and, by means of his own chusing, and instruments of his own preparing, he will accomplish his immutable all-wise decrees. If God had needed his servant any longer, he would not have called him from his work so soon.

And

And seeing the Lord is removing his ministers from the church (and he has removed many of late) how doth it behove their hearers to give attention to their sacred message, whilst they have them to attend upon. And how should we, who in providence are called to that important work, labor to fill up our time in our Master's service; that whenever our Lord shall come, we may be found in his employ, and meeting his approbation, be removed from this uncertain state, to the world of uninterrupted bliss, amidst the joys of saints, the shouts of angels, and the smiles of God.



F I N I S.